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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BEXP](#) [BITO](#) [EAID](#) [OEXC](#) [OIIP](#) [PGOV](#) [SW](#)
SUBJECT: DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN SWEDEN

REF: A. STATE 86401

- [1](#)B. 2009 STOCKHOLM 375
- [1](#)C. 2008 STOCKHOLM 716
- [1](#)D. 2009 STOCKHOLM 457
- [1](#)E. 2008 STOCKHOLM 557
- [1](#)F. 2007 STOCKHOLM 555

[1](#)1. Summary: Diaspora communities are vibrant and visible in Swedish life. Many of these groups arrived because of war and conflict at home. Some of the largest diaspora groups in Sweden include Iraqis (110,000), Iranians (80,000). Kurds (60,000) and Somalis (25,000). In-country outreach to immigrant groups is strong, particularly during the first two years of an immigrant's arrival to Sweden. Despite many generous migration policies, however, immigrants face steep economic and social hurdles as they integrate into Swedish life. To address some of these challenges, the Swedish Trade Council and the MFA launched the "Kosmopolit Project" on September 15 to establish networks where foreign-born entrepreneurs can meet, exchange experience and support each other. A new Swedish study shows that if immigration increases by 12,000 people, the result will be an increase in exports by some \$1 billion. Post outreach to diaspora communities through visitor exchange programs, cultural events and educational/career development has been well-received and represents an area ripe for bilateral engagement. End Summary.

[1](#)2. Answers are keyed to questions in ref A.

[1](#)A. Diaspora communities in Sweden are quite visible in Swedish social life. Statistics Sweden reports that 1.2 million or about 14% of the Swedish population of 9.2 million is foreign-born. Sweden today is a multicultural and diverse country. Non-Swedish communities have traditionally lived in concentrated areas, both strengthening group identity while at the same time highlighting differences between Swedish and non-Swedish populations. Sweden's population has increased by over 240,000 people in the last five years, 77% of whom are immigrants.

[1](#)B. Many diasporans have educational ties to the Swedish community. For example, there are nearly 2,000 Iranians currently studying in Swedish universities, a pattern which has continued since the 1970s. Other groups, such as the Iraqis, have strong family connections in Sweden. The Swedish Migration Board reports that over 33,000 residency permits were granted on the grounds of family ties in 2008, representing about one third of all permits granted that year.

[1](#)C. The Kurdish Diaspora is well organized through several friendship associations that promote Kurdish language instruction and Kurdish cultural events. Through these organizations, Swedish Kurds, in collaboration with international development cooperation organizations like the Olaf Palme International Center, are financial contributors to programs aimed at the reconstruction of infrastructure and the rebuilding of civil society in Iraq.

¶D. Post is aware of several programs that reach out to diaspora communities in Sweden. The Swedish Trade Council along with the MFA's Iraq Desk sponsor regular meetings of Iraqi business leaders in Sweden to foster trade (ref B). The "Kosmopolit Project," launched by the MFA on September 15, aims to establish networks where foreign-born entrepreneurs can meet, exchange experience and support each other. Andreas Hatzigeorgiou, who heads the project, notes that such networks are common in countries like the U.S. According to the MFA, one in five companies set up in Sweden is started by a person with a foreign background. Hatzigeorgiou points to a study he conducted showing that if immigration increases by 12,000 people, the result will be an increase in exports by some \$1 billion. Currently, the Kosmopolit Project will focus on small and medium-sized companies.

¶E. Many immigrants such as Iranians have high levels of education at the time of their arrival to Sweden. Sweden also attracts many new labor migrants. The Swedish Migration Board reports that permits for agricultural, gardening, forestry and fishing applications are on the rise. In previous years, Sweden has received a high number of IT specialist workers. This multicultural labor pool represents a rich resource for reaching out to various diaspora communities.

¶F. Muslim youth in Sweden have organized around messages of peace and tolerance. About 100 young Swedish Muslims, ages 16 to 25, have been trained as "Peace Agents" with the support of two educational associations, Sensus, with Christian roots, and Ibn Rushd, with Muslim roots. Peace Agents visit schools and organizations to promote dialogue about the role of Islam in Swedish society. At an April ceremony attended by Swedish Minister for Trade Ewa Bjorling, the Peace Agents announced their hope of replicating the program in other EU Member States with the goal of training a thousand more Peace Agents in the coming months.

¶G. N/A

¶H. The International Compact with Iraq (ICI) conference held in Stockholm in May 2008 reviewed political and security progress in Iraq and launched a five-year peace and development plan. The conference was attended by some 100 organizations. At the conference, the Iraqi Women Network and the Swedish organization Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman) spoke out about violence against Iraqi women and called for more women to take part in democratic and development processes in Iraq. This is one prominent example of how Iraqi women in Sweden organized to promote democracy and civil society reform in their home country.

¶I. Goran Lindqvist, Deputy Director in the Department for Integration and Urban Development at the Swedish Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, says that there are few programs directed to specific immigrant communities. This is likely the result of Sweden policies that prevent targeting groups based on race, ethnicity or religious affiliation. Instead, immigrants are viewed as part of the overall social welfare system. From a U.S. perspective, this stance can be problematic when developing outreach programs because of the reluctance among some Swedes to identify specific immigrant groups.

¶J. In Sodertalje, a large city south of Stockholm with a substantial Iraqi population, Mayor Anders Lago approached the Embassy about developing an "opportunity fair" to provide information on education and job opportunities in the U.S. to Sodertalje youth. Since 2003, Sodertalje has received nearly 10,000 Iraqi refugees. With strong leadership from the former Ambassador, the October 16, 2008, opportunity fair attracted over 700 youth (ref C). Post has maintained connections with the community and has developed further intercultural initiatives at two local universities.

¶K. At a recent meeting with Poloffs, Ambassador Marika

Fahlen, Director of the MFA's West Africa and Horn of Africa Department, expressed a keen interest in continuing outreach programs between Somali communities in Sweden and in the U.S. (ref D). She noted that Somalis in the U.S. had an easier time integrating than their counterparts in Sweden. At the annual Embassy-sponsored Iftar this fall, a young Muslim woman told Poloff that a visiting delegation of Muslims from the U.S. had been well-received in Sweden, and she looked forward to similar programs in the future.

¶L. In summer 2007, Post sponsored a week-long series of entrepreneurship seminars by Somali-American business leaders that directly reached more than one percent of the Somali community across Sweden and resulted in extensive positive media coverage and the opening of three new immigrant-owned businesses (ref E and F).

¶M. Recommendations for support:

--It would be helpful to have demographic information about diaspora groups both in the U.S. and abroad more readily available such as on a shared "diaspora website."

--To encourage exchange programs between host country and the U.S., engagement initiatives from U.S. diaspora groups should be supported by the Department.

--It would be interesting to see "best practices" or a showcase of innovative diaspora programs at Posts around the world to encourage new program development.

--Visits by diaspora experts to Post would offer new tools for defining, identifying and engaging diaspora.

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